



A Gamble on Meaning: How Translation, Readership, and Authorship Shape the Living Text

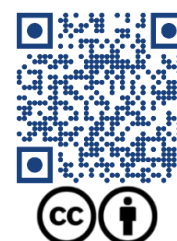
Ayushi

Department of English Literature (MA), University of Delhi, Delhi, India
JRF, GATE

Received: 18 Mar 2026; Received in revised form: 16 Apr 2026; Accepted: 20 Apr 2026; Available online: 26 Apr 2026
©2026 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— *This paper argues that literary meaning is not a static property embedded within a text but a dynamic event that unfolds at the volatile intersection of translation, readership, and authorship. It frames interpretation as a hermeneutic wager, positing that the perceived instabilities within these domains are not deficiencies but the very conditions that grant a text its enduring vitality. The inquiry is threefold. The first section analyses translation as a secondary authorial act, using the manifold translations of the Ramayana and the King James Bible to illustrate how cultural and ideological choices create new literary works. The second section employs reader-response theory, using The Little Prince as a case study to demonstrate how a text functions as a hermeneutic mirror, reflecting the reader's evolving consciousness. The final section reframes the debate on authorial intent through Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the polyphonic novel, arguing that authors like Dostoevsky perform an intentional abdication of monologic authority. The paper concludes that literature lives not despite its ambiguities and instabilities, but because of them, perpetually renewed by the interpretive gamble.*

Keywords— *Hermeneutics, Translation Studies, Reader-Response Theory, Polyphony, Authorial Intent, Literary Meaning, Bakhtin*



I. INTRODUCTION

Literary meaning is not a static property embedded within a text, waiting to be unearthed like a buried artifact. Rather, it is a dynamic and contingent event—an occurrence that unfolds at the volatile intersection of translation, readership, and authorship. The perceived instabilities within these domains, often framed as failures or limitations, are not deficiencies to be lamented but are the very conditions that grant a text its enduring vitality and cultural resonance. This paper advances the thesis that the act of interpretation is a gamble, a wager placed on the unstable ground of language and consciousness, and it is through this perpetual risk that literature lives, breathes, and evolves. This approach consciously positions itself within the intellectual lineage that moved literary studies beyond the formalist confines of New Criticism, which treated the text as a self-contained, autonomous object. The project of this paper is to affirm and explore the post-New Critical understanding that meaning

is not immanent *in* the text but is generated *through* the text's complex and unending interactions with the agents who produce, transmit, and receive it.

To explore this central problem, this paper is structured into three interconnected inquiries. "The Translator's Wager," examines the act of translation as the quintessential hermeneutic gamble. It posits that translation is not a simple linguistic transfer but a high-stakes interpretive negotiation, a process of calculated loss and gain shaped by the translator's own cultural and ideological horizon. Using the manifold English translations of the *Ramayana* and the politically charged history of the King James Bible as case studies, this section will demonstrate how every translation is a new creation, a secondary authorial act that redefines the source text for a new audience.

"The Reader's Mirror," shifts the focus from the creation of the text to its reception, arguing that certain literary works function as hermeneutic mirrors, reflecting the cognitive

and emotional development of the reader. Through a detailed case study of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, this analysis will demonstrate how the novella's meaning is actualized in profoundly diverse ways by readers at various life stages—child, adolescent, and adult—revealing the text as a vessel for the reader's own evolving consciousness.

"The Author's Abdication," confronts the contentious debate over authorial intent. It proposes that Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the "polyphonic novel," exemplified by the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky, offers a sophisticated alternative to the binary of authorial tyranny versus the "death of the author." This section will argue that Dostoevsky's narrative strategy represents a deliberate and intentional abdication of monologic authority, a sophisticated authorial choice to create a dialogic world where no single voice—including the author's own—holds a monopoly on truth.

Underpinning this entire investigation is the philosophical framework of hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation that acknowledges the inescapable role of the interpreter's own context, prejudices, and subjectivity in the generation of meaning. By examining these three critical junctures—translation, readership, and authorship—this paper will construct a holistic model of the literary text not as a fixed object but as a living, unstable, and co-created event, perpetually renewed by the interpretive gamble.

II. THE TRANSLATOR'S WAGER

The act of translation is arguably the most explicit and high-stakes form of literary interpretation. It lays bare the fundamental hermeneutic problem: how to carry meaning across the chasms of language, culture, and time. Far from a mechanical process of substitution, translation is a profound wager where perfect equivalence is an illusion, and every choice precipitates a calculated loss and a potential gain. This process is not a failure to achieve an ideal but the very engine of cross-cultural dialogue, shaped at every turn by the translator's own interpretive horizon.

Modern hermeneutical thought reframes translation from a task of replication to an act of engagement. Philosopher Paul Ricoeur characterizes translation as a "dialogical act," a gesture of "linguistic hospitality" wherein the target language must stretch and adapt to make room for the foreignness of the source text. This is not a seamless transfer but a continuous negotiation, a series of compromises born from the inherent opacity between different linguistic and cultural worlds. The goal is not perfect transparency but a meaningful encounter. This perspective finds a deeper, more metaphysical resonance in Walter Benjamin's seminal essay, "The Task of the Translator." For Benjamin,

translation's ultimate purpose is not to convey information but to gesture toward a "pure language" (Reine Sprache), a messianic state in which all languages, in their distinctness, complement one another to reveal a higher truth. The translator's fidelity, in this view, is not to the reader or the literal meaning, but to this unrealized linguistic potential, an act that "releases" the original text from its own language into a more expansive afterlife.

Central to this understanding is the realization that the "impossibility of synonymy is not a defeat, but rather constitutes the condition of the act of translation itself as an infinite process." Because no two words in different languages carry the exact same constellation of connotations and cultural baggage, the translator is forced into a creative role. This inherent gap prevents the text from becoming a static artifact and necessitates a dynamic, interpretive engagement. This dynamic is best understood through the concepts of "loss" and "gain." "Loss" refers to the inevitable disappearance of source-text features—be it a poetic meter, a cultural allusion, or a wordplay—in the target language. "Gain," conversely, occurs when a translator clarifies an ambiguity, adds a necessary explanation, or enriches the text through their own creative choices. The translator's task, therefore, is not to eliminate loss, which is impossible, but to manage it through conscious compromise and compensation, making deliberate decisions about which features to preserve and which to sacrifice. This dynamic is psychologically potent; the discourse surrounding translation is often marked by "loss-aversion," a tendency to perceive the losses in translation as more significant than the corresponding gains.

This leads to a paradoxical but crucial conclusion: the concept of "untranslatability" is the very engine that drives translation forward. An untranslatable term or concept is not a dead end but a "constant provocation to creative ways of accessing" the text. It forces the translator to move beyond literalism and employ strategies of paraphrase, adaptation, and explanation, thereby creating a new work that enters into dialogue with the original rather than merely attempting to replicate it. The untranslatable is what generates the desire to understand, making the act of translation a necessary and unending hermeneutic pursuit.

III. CASE STUDY I: THE RAMAYANA AND THE WAGER ON FORM VS. FIDELITY

The long history of translating the Valmiki *Ramayana* into English provides a powerful illustration of the translator's wager. Composed in Sanskrit by the sage Valmiki, revered as the *Adi kavi* (first poet), the epic is celebrated for its sublime poetry and lyrical beauty, qualities that are notoriously difficult to render in another language. A

comparison between the colonial-era verse translation by Ralph T.H. Griffith and the contemporary prose translation by Bibek Debroy reveals how different interpretive gambles, separated by time and ideology, produce radically different literary artifacts.

Griffith, writing in the late 19th century, wagered on form. He attempted a full verse translation, aiming to preserve the epic's poetic grandeur for a Victorian English audience accustomed to the formal structures of classical Western epics like the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*. The gain from this choice is a text that feels aesthetically epic to its intended reader, a "literary" interpretation that prioritizes artistic enjoyment. The loss, however, is significant: fidelity to the literal meaning is often sacrificed for the sake of meter and rhyme, and complex cultural concepts are filtered through a distinctly colonial and Christianized lens. This approach exemplifies what the translation theorist Lawrence Venuti would call "domestication." Griffith's translation smooths over the cultural and linguistic foreignness of the Sanskrit original, making it fluent and familiar to the Anglophone reader, but at the cost of erasing its cultural difference.

Debroy, translating in the 21st century, makes the opposite wager. Working from the Baroda Critical Edition of the text, he opts for a literal prose translation, explicitly acknowledging that "it is impossible to capture the beauty of this poetry in an English translation." His stated goal is not to replicate the aesthetic experience but to provide a transparent "bridge" to the original Sanskrit for a modern, scholarly-minded reader. The loss is the poetic form and lyrical flow of the original. The gain is an unprecedented level of fidelity to the source text's narrative content, structure, and cultural specificity. Debroy's work forces the reader to confront the text on its own terms, rather than through the familiarizing filter of English poetic convention. This strategy aligns with Venuti's concept of "foreignization," a method that deliberately retains the strangeness of the source text, challenging the target culture's dominant values and compelling the reader to recognize the text's otherness.

This divergence is starkly visible in their handling of the central, "untranslatable" concept of *dharma*. This single Sanskrit word encompasses a vast semantic field, including duty, righteousness, cosmic law, and social order. Griffith consistently attempts to find an English equivalent, rendering *dharma* as "piety," "duty," or "law," thereby assimilating it into a Western moral and theological vocabulary that strips it of its unique cultural resonance. Debroy, in contrast, frequently leaves the word *dharma* untranslated in the text, relying on extensive footnotes to explain its specific meaning in each context. Griffith's choice prioritizes readability at the cost of cultural nuance;

Debroy's choice prioritizes cultural fidelity at the cost of seamless reading, compelling the audience to grapple with the concept's foreignness.

Furthermore, Debroy's reliance on the Baroda Critical Edition represents a monumental interpretive gambling before the first word is even translated. This scholarly edition was produced by sifting through thousands of manuscripts to create a standardized version, a process that involved excising many passages and episodes believed to be later interpolations. Consequently, Debroy's translation presents a *Ramayana* that may differ significantly from the versions Griffith would have known, and from the popular retellings that have shaped cultural understanding of the epic. As A. K. Ramanujan has famously argued, there is not one *Ramayana* but "three hundred Rāmāyaṇas," a vast ecosystem of tellings and retellings across different languages, regions, and religions. The choice of a source text is itself a powerful act of interpretation that redefines the very object being translated, elevating one version to authoritative status while marginalizing others.

IV. CASE STUDY II: THE KING JAMES BIBLE AND THE WAGER ON AUTHORITY

The King James Version (KJV) of the Bible, often perceived as a timeless and authoritative text, is in fact a product of a series of profound political and theological gambles. Its creation and legacy demonstrate how translation can serve as a powerful tool for consolidating authority, shaping doctrine, and defining a culture's relationship with its most sacred texts.

The first gamble was one of manuscript selection. The KJV's New Testament translators worked primarily from the *Textus Receptus* ("Received Text"), a compilation of Greek manuscripts that were readily available in the early 17th century but were predominantly late-medieval in origin. Since that time, biblical scholarship has unearthed a wealth of much older and more reliable manuscripts. Modern translations, based on this superior textual evidence, often differ from the KJV, leading to significant controversy among those who hold the KJV to be inerrant. A prime example is the "Johannine Comma" in 1 John 5:7. The KJV includes the explicit Trinitarian formula: "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." This verse is absent from the earliest and best Greek manuscripts and is now widely accepted by scholars as a later scribal addition intended to bolster Trinitarian doctrine. The inclusion of this verse in the *Textus Receptus*, and thus in the KJV, was a theological wager that solidified a specific doctrinal interpretation by embedding it directly into the

scriptural text, giving it an authority it did not originally possess.

The second gamble was ideological, centered on the philosophy of translation. King James I commissioned the latest version with explicit instructions to create a text that would conform to the episcopal structure and ecclesiology of the Church of England, thereby reinforcing his own authority as head of the church. The translators adopted a methodology of formal equivalence, striving for a word-for-word rendering of the original Hebrew and Greek wherever possible. This was a direct political move against the then-popular Geneva Bible, a translation favored by Puritans. The Geneva Bible included extensive marginal notes promoting Calvinist theology and, in a direct challenge to monarchical authority, had translated the word "king" as "tyrant" in certain contexts. The KJV, with its formal, majestic prose and avoidance of controversial annotations, was designed to be a unifying text, "Appointed to be read in Churches," that would quell dissent and consolidate the power of the established church and crown.

A final, unforeseen gamble was that of time itself. The very formal equivalence that gave the KJV its authority in the 17th century has, over four hundred years, created a new set of hermeneutic challenges. The English language has evolved, rendering much of the KJV's vocabulary archaic and prone to misinterpretation by modern readers. A well-known example is Matthew 19:14, where the KJV reads, "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come to me." The verb "suffers" in Jacobean English meant "to permit" or "to allow," but to a contemporary reader, it implies causing pain or distress. This linguistic drift demonstrates that a translation's meaning is never fixed. The text itself may remain unchanged, but as the target language evolves, the reader is forced into a new interpretive act, a new gamble to recover a meaning that has been obscured by the passage of time.

In both the *Ramayana* and the Bible, the act of translation reveals itself not as a neutral transfer of information but as a deeply authorial process. The choices made by translators—whether to prioritize poetic form or literal accuracy, which manuscript tradition to follow, how to render culturally specific concepts—are guided by a distinct purpose and ideological framework. This process, where an interpretive agent makes deliberate choices to shape a new textual artifact for a specific audience, is functionally indistinguishable from authorship itself. The translator, therefore, is not a transparent conduit but a secondary author, and their translation is not a copy but a new voice entering into a dialogic relationship with the original. This understanding of the translator's active, authorial role

provides a crucial bridge to the broader questions of authorial intent and textual meaning that will be explored later in this paper.

V. THE READER'S MIRROR

While translation reveals the instability of a text as it moves between languages, the act of reading reveals its instability within a single language, as it is processed by the evolving consciousness of the reader. Certain texts, particularly those rich in allegory and archetype, function as hermeneutic mirrors, reflecting not a fixed, objective meaning but the cognitive and emotional landscape of the person reading them. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's 1943 novella, *The Little Prince*, stands as a paramount example of this phenomenon. It is not simply a book with multiple meanings; it is a text deliberately constructed to yield different layers of significance depending on the reader's stage of life, making it a powerful case study in age-dependent interpretation.

The foundation for this analysis lies in reader-response theory, a school of literary criticism that shifts the focus of inquiry from the text as an autonomous object to the reader's experience of that text. This approach posits that a literary work does not possess a self-contained meaning but comes to life only in the dynamic interaction between text and reader. The reader is a co-creator of meaning, actively "activating" the text by filling in its narrative gaps (*leerstelle*), connecting it to personal experiences, and making sense of its ambiguities. Meaning is therefore not something to be extracted, but something that is produced in the event of reading.

A reader's interpretation is profoundly shaped by their "interpretive community"—the shared assumptions, values, and strategies of a particular group. Crucially, one of the most fundamental interpretive communities we belong to is defined by our age and stage of psychological development. As an individual matures from childhood through adolescence to adulthood, their cognitive abilities, emotional concerns, and life experiences change, altering the lens through which they read. This framework of assumptions is sometimes called a "horizon of expectations." A text like *The Little Prince* can therefore be read by the same person at ages seven, seventeen, and forty, and be experienced as three fundamentally different books.

This developmental perspective is enriched by the insights of psychological and archetypal criticism, particularly the work of Carl Jung. Jung proposed that the human psyche contains a "collective unconscious," a reservoir of shared, universal images and patterns known as archetypes. *The Little Prince* is replete with such archetypes: the wise child

(*puer aeternus*), the journey, the desert as a space of spiritual trial, the rose as a symbol of love and the *anima*. The central narrative can be read as a dialogue between the narrator's adult persona (the Pilot) and his repressed inner child, which is projected onto the figure of the Prince. The resonance of this internal dialogue for any given reader depends heavily on their own relationship with these archetypal forces at their particular stage of life. The power of these archetypes is precisely what allows for the "gap-filling" described by Wolfgang Iser; the archetypal symbol (the rose, the fox) is an indeterminate structure that invites the reader to project their own psychic content onto it, thereby co-creating its specific meaning within the act of reading. The child fills the gap of "the rose" with a simple concept of a treasured pet, while the adult fills it with the complex history of their own romantic relationships.

VI. AGE-DEPENDENT READINGS OF *THE LITTLE PRINCE*

Analyzing the novella through the distinct lenses of a child, an adolescent, and an adult reader reveals how its core symbols and themes are radically reconfigured at each developmental stage. For a young child, *The Little Prince* is primarily a whimsical and enchanting fable, read on a literal level. The Prince is a real boy from a tiny planet, the animals talk, and the journey through space is a straightforward adventure. The central conflict is the clear and relatable opposition between the imaginative, sensible world of children and the baffling, nonsensical world of "grown-ups." The child reader readily identifies with the narrator's frustration that adults cannot see the elephant inside the boa constrictor, recognizing it as a hat instead. The story's moral lessons are understood in direct and concrete terms. The relationship with the rose is a simple story about love and the importance of taking care of something special. The process of "taming" the fox is a lesson in how to make a friend. The fox's famous secret, "what is essential is invisible to the eye," is interpreted as a straightforward maxim: friendship and love are more important than toys or other possessions. The ending of the story is deeply sad, but in a comprehensible way: the Prince, a beloved friend, has been bitten by a snake and has gone away, leaving the narrator lonely. The child's reading is characterized by emotional immediacy, a focus on the narrative of friendship, and a clear identification with the Prince's perspective.

For the adolescent reader, who is in the liminal space between childhood and adulthood, the story deepens into a poignant and bittersweet allegory of alienation, identity, and loss. The literal fable gives way to a metaphorical reading. The Prince's journey is no longer just an adventure; it is a symbolic departure from the innocence of home to confront

a confusing and often hypocritical adult world. The satirical portraits of the adults on the various planets—the King with no subjects, the Vain Man who craves empty admiration, the Businessman who obsessively counts stars he cannot own—resonate powerfully with the adolescent's own developing critique of societal norms and adult absurdity. These characters are no longer just silly; they are emblems of a world that has lost its way, a world the adolescent feels alienated from but is being pressured to join. The fox's secret acquires a new layer of profound sadness. "Taming" is now understood not just as making a friend, but as the process of creating a unique, irreplaceable bond, which makes the inevitability of separation all the more painful. The discovery that there are thousands of other roses is a devastating blow, a metaphor for the loss of childhood's sense of uniqueness and the dawning awareness of a larger, more indifferent world. The novella's melancholy tone becomes its dominant feature. The ending is no longer just the departure of a friend; it is an existential meditation on the transience of life, the pain of growing up, and the irretrievable loss of childhood innocence.

For the adult reader, the novella undergoes a final transformation, becoming a profound philosophical and psychological text about existential responsibility, authenticity, and the arduous work of spiritual integration. The focus of the narrative shifts from the Prince to the Pilot. The story is no longer about the Prince's journey, but about the Pilot's spiritual crisis and recovery. The plane crash in the desert ceases to be a mere plot device and becomes a powerful symbol for the breakdown of the adult's structured, rational world, forcing a confrontation with the barrenness of a life lived without meaning. From this perspective, the Little Prince is not an external character but an archetypal projection of the Pilot's—and by extension, the reader's—own lost inner child. The Prince's arrival represents the return of a repressed part of the self—the capacity for wonder, imagination, and emotional honesty—which must be re-integrated for the adult to achieve psychic wholeness. The entire story becomes an internal dialogue between the pragmatic, jaded adult, and the wise, demanding child within.

The story's philosophical lessons become paramount. The fox's secret is now understood as a complex statement on the existential creation of value. Nothing in the world has intrinsic meaning; meaning is generated through the deliberate investment of time, attention, and love. The Prince's rose is unique not because of any inherent quality, but because "it is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important." The rose itself becomes a more complex symbol, representing not just pure love but a real, difficult relationship, complete with vanity, demands, and misunderstanding, for which one is nonetheless

responsible. Finally, the Prince's death is reinterpreted as a necessary symbolic sacrifice. The physical body, the literal self, must be shed for a spiritual rebirth and a return to "what is essential." The adult reader understands that the Pilot's ultimate sadness is the recognition that this perfect integration is fleeting, and the work of keeping the inner child alive is a constant, lifelong struggle.

The genius of *The Little Prince* lies not in having a single, hidden meaning, but in its deliberate construction as a "hermeneutic machine" designed to evolve with its reader. Saint-Exupéry populates his narrative with simple, open-ended archetypal symbols—a prince, a rose, a fox, a desert—that resist narrow definition and thus serve as blank canvases for the reader's projections. The central conflict is explicitly framed as a clash between the child's way of seeing and the adult's, which immediately primes readers to align themselves based on their own life stage. The novella's core philosophical statements are abstract enough to function on multiple levels of complexity, from a simple moral for a child to a profound existential axiom for an adult. In this way, Saint-Exupéry's authorial achievement was not in authoring a book for children or for adults, but in engineering a textual structure that anticipates and leverages the reader's own psychological and hermeneutic development across a lifetime. The text remains a constant, but the reader is an ever-changing variable, and the meaning of *The Little Prince* is the living product of their ongoing interaction.

VII. THE AUTHOR'S ABDICATION

The question of meaning, having been explored through the lenses of translation and readership, culminates in the most contentious debate in modern literary theory: the role of the author. For centuries, the author was considered the sovereign of the text, the sole guarantor of its true meaning. The 20th century saw a dramatic rebellion against this notion, famously culminating in the declaration of the "Death of the Author." This section argues that the work of Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, particularly his concept of the "polyphonic novel" as realized in the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky, offers a powerful third way. It is not the death of the author, but rather the author's intentional abdication of absolute authority—a deliberate choice to create a dialogic world where no single voice, including the author's own, holds a monopoly on truth.

The traditional model of literary interpretation is rooted in authorial intentionalism. In this view, the author's intended meaning is the ultimate standard by which any interpretation should be judged. The critic's task is to reconstruct the author's historical context, biographical details, and stated purposes to arrive at the one "correct"

reading of the text. The author is the origin and final arbiter of meaning.

This position came under sustained attack in the mid-20th century from two influential schools of thought. First, the Anglo-American New Critics, in their seminal 1946 essay "The Intentional Fallacy," argued that the author's intent is "neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art." Intent, they claimed, is a private psychological state that cannot be definitively recovered; all we have is the public text itself. The work must be analyzed on its own terms, as a self-contained aesthetic object. Two decades later, the French post-structuralist Roland Barthes delivered the final blow in his 1967 essay, "The Death of the Author." Barthes argued that the very concept of the "Author" is a modern invention designed to impose a limit on a text, to give it a "final signified." Once writing is released into the world, it becomes a "tissue of quotations" drawn from innumerable centers of culture, and its unity lies not in its origin but in its destination: the reader. The "death of the Author," Barthes proclaimed, is the necessary condition for the "birth of the reader," who is now free to play with the text and generate a multiplicity of meanings. This critique effectively severs the text from its creator, rendering authorial intent irrelevant.

While Barthes was writing the author's obituary, Mikhail Bakhtin's work, written decades earlier but only then being discovered in the West, offered a more nuanced and generative alternative. Bakhtin identified in the novels of Dostoevsky a radically new artistic form he termed the "polyphonic novel." Unlike the traditional "monologic" novel, in which every character, plot point, and idea serves to articulate the author's single, overarching worldview, the polyphonic novel is defined by "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices." Bakhtin's model provides a crucial corrective to the binary opposition set up by the New Critics and Barthes. Where they see only two options—authorial tyranny or authorial irrelevance, Bakhtin reveals a third: an author who is intensely present, not as a dictator of meaning, but as the master architect of a dialogic structure. The author's intention is not to be found in any single character's voice, but in the masterful orchestration of the entire polyphonic design.

The key innovation of polyphony is the creation of the truly autonomous character. In Dostoevsky's world, Bakhtin argues, major characters are "not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse." They are not mere mouthpieces for ideas the author wishes to explore; they are fully-formed consciousnesses with their own coherent and powerful

ideologies. Their voices carry a weight equal to that of the narrator and, crucially, equal to the author's own ideological position. This structural innovation reflects a deeper philosophical principle Bakhtin call "dialogism." For Bakhtin, truth is not a static proposition that can be possessed by a single mind (a monologic truth). Instead, truth is an event that emerges in the process of dialogue between distinct, unmerged consciousnesses. It is inherently open-ended and "unfinalizable." The world is not yet finished, and the final word has not been spoken. The role of the polyphonic author, then, is not to provide definitive answers or to prove a thesis. The author's role is to stage "the great dialogue," to create the conditions under which these autonomous voices can confront one another in a state of maximum tension, without predetermining the outcome. This is not an absence of authorial intent; it is a higher-order authorial intent—the intent to represent reality itself as fundamentally dialogic.

VIII. DOSTOEVSKY'S POLYPHONIC ART

Dostoevsky's major novels serve as the primary evidence for Bakhtin's theory, demonstrating how a master author can intentionally relinquish monologic control to create a world of ideological equals. In *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), the entire narrative architecture is built upon the irresolvable ideological conflict between radical faith and radical doubt. This conflict is embodied in the voices of the brothers Alyosha and Ivan. Alyosha and his elder, Father Zosima, articulate a worldview of mystical faith, active love, and universal responsibility. In direct opposition, Ivan Karamazov presents one of the most powerful arguments for atheism in all of literature, culminating in the parable of "The Grand Inquisitor," a searing indictment of a God who would create a world founded on the suffering of innocent children. Dostoevsky, a devout Orthodox Christian, gives Ivan's rebellion such intellectual and emotional force that it cannot be easily refuted or dismissed by Zosima's teachings. The author refuses to stack the deck. He does not provide a final, authoritative answer to the "accursed questions" his characters pose. Instead, he allows these two "fully valid voices" to clash in an eternal dialogue, leaving the reader suspended in the unfinalized space between them. The novel's ultimate thesis is not a statement for or against God, but the very dialogue itself—the recognition that this struggle is the defining condition of human consciousness.

A similar process occurs within the mind of a single character in *Crime and Punishment* (1866). The novel is a masterful depiction of internal polyphony, with Raskolnikov's consciousness serving as the battleground for competing, unmerged "voice-ideas." On one side is the voice of his rational, utilitarian theory—the idea of the

"extraordinary man" who has the right to transgress moral law for a higher purpose, which justifies the murder of the pawnbroker. On the other side is the voice of his innate empathy and Christian conscience, which drives him to irrational acts of charity and, ultimately, toward Sonia and the possibility of confession. Dostoevsky's third-person omniscient narration does not simply report on Raskolnikov's thoughts from a finalizing, external perspective. Instead, it immerses the reader directly into the cacophony of his "inner dialogues," allowing each voice to speak with its own logic and passion. Raskolnikov is not a unified character with a single motive; he is the living event of these voices in conflict. As the great Dostoevsky biographer Joseph Frank argues, the novelist's genius was to transform philosophical ideas from abstract propositions into the very fabric of his characters' personalities, making the drama of the novels an "amalgam of the most abstract problems of human existence with the most concrete details of a contemporary social scene." The polyphonic method is the engine of this transformation.

In creating such works, Dostoevsky performs a radical authorial abdication. A monologic novel, by its very nature, subordinates all its elements to the author's singular, ultimate truth, reflecting a structure of thought that is fundamentally authoritarian. The author, in this model, acts as the final arbiter of reality. Dostoevsky, in stark contrast, intentionally creates characters who are "subjects of their own directly signifying discourse," allowing voices that directly challenge his own deeply held religious beliefs to exist with their full ideological power. This is not merely an aesthetic choice; it is a profoundly ethical one. It demonstrates a deep respect for the "otherness" of his characters, a refusal to "finalize" them or reduce them to mere pawns in a didactic game. Dostoevsky's authorial intent, therefore, is not to preach a specific doctrine but to create a literary model of an ethical universe—a universe where individual freedom, the integrity of consciousness, and the open-ended, dialogic search for truth are the highest possible values. Polyphony is the aesthetic form of this ethical commitment.

IX. CONCLUSION

This paper has traversed three critical sites of literary interpretation—translation, translating readership, and authorship—to argue for a unified understanding of the literary text as a dynamic and living event. The analysis of the translator's "gamble," the reader's evolving "mirror," and the author's polyphonic "abdication" reveals these are not disparate phenomena but three facets of the same fundamental principle: the inherent and productive instability of meaning. The text is not a monument to be

preserved but a score to be performed, and its vitality is located precisely in the interpretive risks taken at each performance. The translator's wager, as seen in the divergent English renderings of the *Ramayana* and the Bible, demonstrates that a text is reborn with every cross-linguistic encounter. The "untranslatability" of Valmiki's poetry or the concept of *dharma*, and the linguistic decay of the King James Version's Jacobean English, are not failures. They are invitations—gaps in the textual fabric that demand creative intervention, forcing the translator to become a secondary author whose own cultural and ideological commitments are inscribed into the new work. Each translation is a new voice entering the great dialogue of literary history.

The age-dependent hermeneutics of *The Little Prince* illustrate that even within a single language, a text is never static. It is a vessel that is filled and refilled by the evolving consciousness of its readers. The novella's transformation from a child's fable of friendship, to an adolescent's allegory of alienation, to an adult's philosophical treatise on existential responsibility shows that meaning is not an attribute of the text alone, but a product of the interaction between its symbolic structures and the reader's own developmental stage. The text acts as a mirror, and its meaning shifts as the face reflected in it changes over a lifetime. Finally, Dostoevsky's polyphonic art provides a masterful resolution to the problem of authorial intent. By intentionally relinquishing absolute authority and creating a world of ideologically autonomous characters, Dostoevsky models a universe where truth is not a monologic decree but a dialogic process. The unresolved debates in his novels are not a sign of authorial indecision but a profound ethical and artistic choice to represent human consciousness as fundamentally free, open-ended, and unfinalizable.

In synthesizing these three inquiries, a clear picture emerges. The perceived flaws of literature—its ambiguity, its resistance to definitive translation, its susceptibility to varied interpretation, its refusal to provide simple answers—are, in fact, its greatest strengths. These are the tensions that invite our engagement, which compel us to participate in the co-creation of meaning. The ultimate gamble of literature is this act of release: from the original language to the translator, from the author to the character, and from the completed text to the endless succession of readers. It is in this continuous, open-ended hermeneutic process that a work transcends its historical moment and becomes a living, breathing part of human culture, forever unstable and forever new.

REFERENCES

- [1] Paul Ricoeur, *On Translation*, trans. Eileen Brennan (London: Routledge, 2006).
- [2] Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 69–82.
- [3] Ricoeur, *On Translation*.
- [4] Ralph T. H. Griffith, trans., *The Rāmāyan of Vālmiki* (Benares: E. J. Lazarus and Co., 1895).
- [5] Bibek Debroy, trans., *The Valmiki Ramayana*, 3 vols. (Gurgaon: Penguin Random House India, 2017).
- [6] Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995).
- [7] Debroy, *The Valmiki Ramayana*.
- [8] A. K. Ramanujan, "Three Hundred Rāmāyaṇas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation," in *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 22–49.
- [9] Gordon Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version 1611-2011* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- [10] Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- [11] Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: German Bible Society / United Bible Societies, 1994).
- [12] Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, trans. Katherine Woods (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1943).
- [13] Louise M. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1938).
- [14] Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).
- [15] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).
- [16] Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).
- [17] C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, vol. 9, part 1 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968).
- [18] W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *The Sewanee Review* 54, no. 3 (1946): 468–88.
- [19] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 142–48.
- [20] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed., and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 6.
- [21] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, first published in *The Russian Messenger*, 1880.
- [22] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, first published in *The Russian Messenger*, 1866.
- [23] Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).